



CONGREGAZIONE  
PER LA DOTTRINA  
DELLA FEDE

00120 Città del Vaticano, February 6, 2008  
Palazzo del S. Uffizio

PROT. N. 177/85 – 26842  
*(Si prega citare il numero nella risposta)*

Your Eminence/Your Excellency,

In response to a number of inquiries, this Congregation has conducted a study into the validity of various formulas which use so called 'inclusive language' for the conferral of the sacrament of Baptism.

Having completed the study, this Dicastery is now in a position to publish its response to these queries in the form of a *Responsa ad proposita dubia* (cf. *enclosure 1*) together with an explanatory article (cf. *enclosure 2*).

The *Responsa* will be published on March 1, 2008 in *L'Osservatore Romano*, until which time it remains strictly confidential.

This Dicastery would be grateful if you would forward the enclosed documentation to all the Bishops of the Conference of which you are President in good time, so that they will be informed about the *Responsa* prior to its publication.

With many thanks for your cooperation in this matter and wishing you every blessing, I am

Yours sincerely in Christ,  
*William Card. Levada*  
William Cardinal Levada  
*Prefect*

(2 Enclosures)

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THE PRESIDENTS OF THE EPISCOPAL CONFERENCES

# CONGREGATION FOR THE DOCTRINE OF THE FAITH

## RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS PROPOSED on the validity of Baptism conferred with the formulas

«*I baptize you in the name of the Creator, and of the Redeemer, and of the Sanctifier*» and  
«*I baptize you in the name of the Creator, and of the Liberator, and of the Sustainer*»

### QUESTIONS

**First question:** Whether the Baptism conferred with the formulas «*I baptize you in the name of the Creator, and of the Redeemer, and of the Sanctifier*» and «*I baptize you in the name of the Creator, and of the Liberator, and of the Sustainer*» is valid?

**Second question:** Whether the persons baptized with those formulas have to be baptized *in forma absoluta*?

### RESPONSES

**To the first question:** Negative.

**To the second question:** Affirmative.

*The Supreme Pontiff Benedict XVI, at the Audience granted to the undersigned Cardinal Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, approved these Responses, adopted in the Ordinary Session of the Congregation, and ordered their publication.*

Rome, from the Offices of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, February 1, 2008.

**WILLIAM Cardinale LEVADA**  
*Prefect*

✠ **ANGELO AMATO, S.D.B.**  
Titular Archbishop of Sila  
*Secretary*

**A New *Response* of the  
Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith  
on the Validity of Baptism**

*Msgr. Antonio Miralles*

Baptism, the “water of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit” (*Tit* 3:5), constitutes one of the most precious gifts with which the Lord Jesus has enriched his Church. Indeed, by means of Baptism “we are freed from sin and reborn as sons of God; we become members of Christ, are incorporated into the Church and made sharers in her mission.”<sup>1</sup> It is understandable, therefore, that Christians in every age have concerned themselves with its correct celebration, in order that it might correspond exactly to the original will of Christ himself. Doubts were not minimized when they arose, but on the contrary Christians sought to guarantee true Baptism. Of course, the Church’s Magisterium has a decisive role in this work of clarification. Interventions of the Holy Office and the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith in recent centuries have reflected this care for the validity of Baptism; in the last two decades, there have been three.<sup>2</sup>

The present *Response* concerns a question about the validity of Baptism conferred within the Catholic Church with two specific formulas in the English language. This element is significant, because it indicates that this is not simply a hypothetical question, but rather relates to events that have taken place in some English-speaking countries. Obviously, the problem does not relate to the fact that the words are in the English language, but to the formula itself, which could be expressed in any language.

The importance of this problem cannot be minimized, since it is a matter of people’s salvation, which, according to the Lord himself, requires Baptism: “Amen, amen I say to you, no one can enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and the spirit” (*Jn* 3:5). From this comes the mission to baptize which Jesus entrusted to the disciples: “Go into the whole world and proclaim the Gospel to every creature. Whoever believes

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<sup>1</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1213.

<sup>2</sup> *Responsum ad propositum dubium de validitate baptismatis apud communitatem «The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints»*, 5 June 2001: AAS 93 (2001) 476; *Notificatio de validitate baptismatis apud «The New Church» confessionem collati*, 20 November 1992: AAS 85 (1993) 179; *Notificatio de validitate baptismatis apud «Christian Community» Rudolfi Steiner confessionem*, 9 March 1991: AAS 83 (1991) 422.

and is baptized will be saved, whoever does not believe will be condemned” (*Mk* 16:15-16). Therefore, the Church cannot tolerate the use of formulas which invalidate the conferral of a true Baptism. It would furthermore be irresponsible to minimize this danger by comforting oneself with the thought that God is able to remedy all human failures. Instead, we are called to carry out well that which God has entrusted to our responsibility.

Baptism conferred in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit conforms to the command of the Lord found at the end of Matthew’s Gospel: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (*Mt* 28:19). The Church has no right to change what Christ himself has instituted. Therefore, any Baptism is invalid when it does not contain the invocation of the Most Holy Trinity, with the distinct expression of the three Persons with their respective names. Throughout the ages, the Magisterium of the Church has repeatedly taught that Christian Baptism is administered in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. There is no need here to compile a complete list of the relevant magisterial documents; it may suffice to cite some of the more notable ones: the *Tomus Damasi* (382),<sup>3</sup> the decretals *Desiderabilem mihi* of Pope Saint Gregory II (726)<sup>4</sup> and *Sacris liminibus* of Pope Saint Zacharias (748),<sup>5</sup> the chapter *De fide catholica* of the Fourth Lateran Council (1215),<sup>6</sup> the constitution *Fidei catholicae* of the Council of Vienne (1312),<sup>7</sup> the bull *Exsultate Deo* of the Council of Florence (1439),<sup>8</sup> the decree *De sacramentis* of the Council of

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<sup>3</sup> “...for we are baptized solely in the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit” (H. DENZINGER – A. SCHÖNMETZER, *Enchiridion Symbolorum definitionum et declarationum de rebus fidei et morum*, [= DS], 176).

<sup>4</sup> “... you should hold to the ancient practice of the Church: that whoever has been baptized in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit must in no case be rebaptized” (DS 580).

<sup>5</sup> “If someone was immersed in the baptismal font without the invocation of the Trinity, he has not been perfected, unless he will have been baptized in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit” (DS 589).

<sup>6</sup> “But the sacrament of Baptism (which is a consecration in water at the invocation of God and the indivisible Trinity, that is, of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit) is profitable unto salvation for children as well as adults, by whomsoever it is correctly conferred according to the form established by the Church” (DS 802).

<sup>7</sup> “One Baptism, which regenerates all who are baptized in Christ must be faithfully confessed by all just as ‘one God and one faith’ (*Eph* 4:5). We believe that baptism, celebrated with water in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, is the perfect remedy for salvation both for adults and children in common” (DS 903).

<sup>8</sup> “...the form is: *I baptize you in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit*” (DS 1314).

Trent (1547).<sup>9</sup> The liturgical documents on the Rite of Baptism do not offer alternatives to the terms Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Sacramental formulas are to be examined as expressions of the faith of the Church. They are words of faith, from which they derive their efficacy, as Saint Augustine clearly shows in regard to the baptismal formula.<sup>10</sup> Saint Thomas Aquinas, commenting on this passage from Saint Augustine, states that in the sacraments the words are efficacious not simply because they are pronounced, but because they express that which is the object of faith.<sup>11</sup> This is what is contained in the pronouncements of the Magisterium cited above. The baptismal formula must adequately express the Trinitarian faith: approximate formulas cannot do this.

The variants to the baptismal formula treated in the *Response* employ terms for the Divine Persons which are different from those found in the Bible. Such formulas result from certain feminist ideas about God, in order to avoid saying Father and Son, which are considered sexist. But substituting other names for Father and Son undermines our faith in the Trinity.

In order to express in synthesis the Trinitarian faith, we can turn to the Athanasian Creed, which is cited in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*: “Now this is the Catholic faith: We worship one God in the Trinity and the Trinity in unity, without either confusing the Persons or dividing the substance; for the Person of the Father is one, the Son’s another, the Holy Spirit’s another; but the Godhead of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit is one, their glory equal, their majesty coeternal.”<sup>12</sup> The names of the three divine Persons are those by which they are repeatedly designated in the New Testament and in the Tradition of the Church. They are relative names, that is to say, they designate the Persons as they relate to each other with regard to origin, by which they are distinguished. Indeed, “because it does not divide the divine unity, the real distinction of

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<sup>9</sup> “If anyone says that the Baptism which is conferred also by heretics in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit with the intention of doing what the Church does, is not true Baptism, let him be anathema” (DS 1617).

<sup>10</sup> “From where does the water have such power, that it touches the body and cleanses the heart, except by the word which is acting – not because it is spoken, but because it is believed? For also in the word itself, the sound that passes away is one thing, the power that remains is something else” (*In Iohannis Evangelium*, tr. 80, 3: CCL 36, p. 529).

<sup>11</sup> “As Augustine says in his *Commentary on John’s Gospel*, the word is operative in the sacraments ‘not because it is spoken,’ that is, not according to the exterior sound of the voice, but ‘because it is believed,’ according to the meaning of the words which is held by faith” (*Summa theologiae*, III, q. 60, a. 7, ad 1).

<sup>12</sup> DS 75, cited in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 266.

the Persons from one another resides solely in the relationships which relate them to one another.”<sup>13</sup> God “is eternally Father in relation to his only Son who is eternally Son only in relation to his Father,”<sup>14</sup> and the “Holy Spirit is...revealed as another divine Person” in relation to Jesus and to the Father.”<sup>15</sup>

The names *Creator*, *Redeemer*, and *Sanctifier* or *Creator*, *Liberator*, and *Sustainer* can be attributed to the divine Persons by appropriation, according to the logic that what is common to the three Persons is attributed to one of them, inasmuch as it has a certain likeness to what is proper to the Person.<sup>16</sup> For example, being Creator is attributed to the Father because, in the act of creating, the divine power is shown in the highest way as the principle of the being of creatures. This power has a certain likeness to what is proper to the Father in the inner-trinitarian life, that is, being the unoriginated principle of the other Persons.<sup>17</sup> But “creation is the common work of the Holy Trinity.”<sup>18</sup> Pope Leo XIII taught in general terms: “The Church is accustomed most fittingly to attribute to the Father those works in which power excels, to the Son those in which wisdom excels, and to the Holy Spirit those in which love excels. Not that all perfections and external operations are not common to the divine Persons; indeed, ‘the operations of the Trinity are indivisible, even as the essence of the Trinity is indivisible’<sup>19</sup>.”<sup>20</sup>

The trinitarian faith is not adequately expressed when the three divine Persons are designated by names common to the three, while attributing by appropriation each individual name to a Person. And this is what happens in the formulas considered by the *Response*. All three divine Persons are Creator, Sanctifier, Liberator, and Sustainer. “The whole divine economy is the common work of the three divine Persons. For as the Trinity has only one and the same nature, so too does it have only one and the same operation.”<sup>21</sup> Redemption is also the work of the entire Trinity as its first cause even though the name Redeemer is proper to Christ as man because, in his humanity, he suffered and died on the Cross.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 255.

<sup>14</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 240.

<sup>15</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 243.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. SAINT THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa theologiae*, I, q. 39, a. 7.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. SAINT THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa theologiae*, I, qq. 39, a. 8 et 45, a. 6, ad 2-3.

<sup>18</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 292.

<sup>19</sup> SAINT AUGUSTINE, *De Trinitate*, I, 4: PL 42, 824.

<sup>20</sup> Encyclical Letter *Divinum illud munus*, 9 May 1897: DS 3326.

<sup>21</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 258.

<sup>22</sup> Cf. SAINT THOMAS AQUINAS, *Summa theologiae*, III, q. 48, a. 5.

Trinitarian faith calls for careful precision in language. If the substitution of the names of the divine Persons in the baptismal formula by other names that are proper to each of them (Parent, Child and Issue from both) had given rise to such serious doubt among theologians that Thomas Aquinas considered it invalid,<sup>23</sup> then there is all the more reason to hold that what is conferred with the formulas considered in the questions presented to the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith is not true Baptism.

Therefore, a person who performs a baptism with one of these invalid formulas defrauds the recipient of this action. In the case of a child, he also defrauds those who present the child for Baptism, because they are expecting a true Baptism. This is a grave injustice which must be remedied without delay, not postponed indefinitely based on the efficacy of the desire for Baptism. The gift of the sacramental character of Baptism must be guaranteed as soon as possible: “Baptism seals the Christian with the indelible spiritual mark (*character*) of his belonging to Christ... Incorporated into the Church by Baptism, the faithful have received the sacramental character that consecrates them for Christian religious worship.”<sup>24</sup>

The ecumenical importance of guaranteeing true Baptism is clearer now than ever before. We call ourselves Christians in virtue of our common Baptism. With regard to the numerous persons who belong to Churches or Ecclesial communities not in full communion with the Catholic Church, even if there are deficiencies with regard to faith, the other sacraments and Church governance, “Baptism constitutes the sacramental bond of unity, which exists among all those who by means of it have been regenerated.”<sup>25</sup> If a Community relinquishes true Baptism, it takes a great step backwards on the path of ecumenism, by distancing itself tremendously from the desired goal of full communion that Christ himself desires.<sup>26</sup> All of us Christians are called to remain solidly faithful to the unity expressed so well in the Letter to the Ephesians: there is “one Lord, one faith, one Baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in all” (*Eph* 4:5-6). Strengthened by this intervention of the

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<sup>23</sup> Cf. SAINT THOMAS AQUINAS, *Scriptum super Sententiis*, IV, d. 3, q. 1, a. 2, s. 2, ad 5; *Summa theologiae*, III, q. 66, a. 5, arg. 7 et ad 7.

<sup>24</sup> *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1272-1273.

<sup>25</sup> SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, Decree *Unitatis redintegratio*, 22/2.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, Decree *Unitatis redintegratio*, 4/1.

Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, the Church's pastors must also be vigilant regarding other possible invalid baptismal formulas.